

## Would you like to save hundreds of dollars?

Nearly 600,000 children in Wisconsin take part in the National School Lunch Program each day. Of this total, nearly 59 percent take advantage of free or reduced-price meals.\* If you have children who are in school, or will soon be starting, you may be interested in learning more about how you can benefit from this program. This newsletter covers the basics on the subject. For more details, please contact your local school district office.

\* Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service data for January 2008

## What are the School Nutrition Programs?

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs are government funded through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). All meals must meet good nutritional standards. Even at the regular prices, these programs are affordably priced, but they are also designed to give families on tight budgets help with paying for school meals.



## Why eat school meals?

Because each meal must meet health requirements set by the USDA, you know that the food served will be balanced and healthy. Also, school meals can improve your child's attention and test scores, and reduce their illnesses and absences (students should hunger for knowledge, not food!). They can also help with obesity prevention because children are more likely to consume vegetables and less likely to consume soda or other high calorie foods.

## Who can get Free or Reduced Meals?

Children in households getting FoodShare or W-2 cash benefits and most foster children can get free meals regardless of your income. For 2009-10, children from families with incomes of \$28,665 or less for a family of four are eligible for free lunches, according to the USDA. Students from families with incomes \$40,793 or less for a family of four are eligible for reduced-cost meals. The chart on the next page shows monthly income limits for different household sizes.

## The benefits of Free or Reduced School Meals

Taking advantage of free and reduced meals helps to keep costs in line for both families and the schools, so if you're eligible, there are some very good reasons to apply. For example:

- They help make your family food budget go further. For families who qualify for reduced meals, the cost is only 30¢ for breakfast and 40¢ for lunch.
- This may seem like a small amount, but it can really add up over the course of a school year, helping you with other bills, such as heating, rent and gas.
- Your school district receives extra federal and state government funding for all students, based on the results of the forms submitted by parents.

## Income Eligibility Guidelines for Free or Reduced School Meals

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Household Size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Monthly Income Limit for <b>FREE MEALS</b>	\$1,174	\$1,579	\$1,984	\$2,389	\$2,794	\$3,200	\$3,605
Monthly Income Limit for <b>REDUCED-PRICE MEALS</b>	\$1,670	\$2,247	\$2,823	\$3,400	\$3,976	\$4,553	\$5,130

### What information might I need when I apply?

- A paycheck stub or pay envelope showing the amount and how often paid; or
- A letter from employer stating your gross wages and how often they are paid; or
- Business or farming papers, such as ledger or tax books.
- Your Social Security retirement benefit letter, statement of benefits received, or pension award notice.
- Notice of eligibility from the state employment security office, check stub, or letter from Worker's Compensation.
- A Benefit letter from welfare agency.
- A court decree, agreement, or copies of checks received for child support or alimony.
- If you have no income, a brief note explaining how you provide food, clothing and housing for your household, and when you expect an income.

### Will others know if my children are getting Free or Reduced Meals?

No. The same meals offered to children through the free or reduced meal programs are offered to children who purchase meals at the full price. Because schools *want* as many children as possible to participate, they make every effort to be sure that those who qualify for free or reduced price meals are not singled out or publicly identified in any way.

### Other Frequently Asked Questions:

- **Do we qualify if we get WIC?** Your children may be eligible for free or reduced price meals, but you will need to fill out an application.
- **What if my income is not always the same?** You must list the amount that you normally get.
- **Do I need to fill out an application for each child?** No, you only need one application for each household.
- **Do I need to fill out an application if my children are receiving FoodShare?** No, your children will be "directly certified," and you will need to do nothing else.
- **Can I apply for free or reduced price meals at any time during the school year?** Yes, you may apply anytime during the school year. If you are not eligible now, but have a change, then you can choose to complete an application at that time.
- **Once I apply, how long will it take?** Once the application is returned to the school, you should expect to be contacted within 10 days.

The Crawford & Vernon Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program is supported by the USDA Food Stamp Program, UW-Extension, FoodShare Wisconsin, and local partners. In Wisconsin, FoodShare can help provide a healthy diet. To find out more about FoodShare in Crawford County, call (608) 326-0248 and Vernon County (608)637-5210. An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer, the University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming including ADA and Title IX requirements.